

CAPITAL REPORT

Background on Syrian Crisis

By FULTON LEWIS, Jr.

WASHINGTON, Aug. 27.—The Syrian crisis has sparked new life in the Senate's Internal Security Subcommittee investigations, in spite of muzzling efforts by Mr. Dulles' State Department.

The key figure is Robert Caldwell Strong, who is left in charge d'affaires in the Damascus embassy, after three other members of the staff were expelled on phony charges by the new Red government.

Strong has a talent for being present when governments fall to Communism. He was in charge in China, too, when the Communists took over the mainland, and he moved to Formosa when the Chiang government made its withdrawal in December, 1949.

When he showed up in the topknot of the Damascus embassy in July of 1954, with John K. Emerson, one of the old China intrigue boys, as his opposite number in next-door Lebanon, committee attention perked high. They called Emerson to Washington and involved him in the case of Canadian diplomat E. Herbert Norman, who was in nearby Cairo until he committed suicide.

The State Department brought immediate and heavy pressure, and when committee chairman James Eastland resisted, they operated through the Senate Democratic leadership. The committee was threatened with a cut-off of funds, if the subject was pursued further.

THE SPOTLIGHT turned to Strong when Admiral Charles Maynard Cooke, chief of staff to Admiral King during the



GEN. MacARTHUR

He was worried.

war, a previous witness, told of Strong's activities on Formosa until he was recalled to Washington because of antagonism to Chiang.

Admiral Cooke said Strong used the embassy in Formosa as a sounding board for highly demoralizing predictions of doom, and false reports about the performance of the Nationalist armies. When Admiral Cooke, who was present in the evacuation operations, questioned the accuracy of the statements, Strong said he preferred to accept his own intelligence information.

General MacArthur, in Tokyo, was worried over Strong's reports. He sent his personal intelligence officer to Formosa, Brig. Gen. Louis Fortier, to find out whether his flank might be in danger of being exposed. Strong refused to permit General Fortier on the island. General Fortier fulfilled his mission only

by making an unauthorized night landing without Strong's knowledge.

In the light of all these facts, committee counsel Robert Morris wanted to call in Strong for questioning about the Middle Eastern situation, and possibly forestall trouble there. He made inquiries at the State Department, met further resistance. In desperation, he went to Chairman Eastland and threatened to resign if the Dulles hamstrangling was to continue.

Eastland, who doesn't intimidate easily, told him to go ahead with the Strong investigation and he would take care of the pressure and the funds.

MORRIS went back to the State Department, insisted that Strong be recalled for questioning as of August 15. This was several weeks ago.

The Department said that this would be very inconvenient, because the ambassador to Syria, James S. Moose, Jr., has been in this country for some months and Strong was needed in Damascus. They said, however, that he was due to return to Washington September 11, and could testify at that time.

Morris agreed, although it meant that committee members would have to return to Washington during the recess to conduct the hearings. As of the August 15th date, the Red takeover of Syria was under way, and the expulsions from the U. S. Embassy in Syria were in progress, leaving Robert A. Strong in supreme command.

The committee, however, insists that he appear on September 15.

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